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THE MILKWEED VINE AMD A NEWLY OBSERVED CERCOSPORA LEAF SPOT

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The strangler vine or milkweed vine, Morrenia odorata Lindl. is a serious pest in many citrus groves of Central Florida (2) and poses a threat to all Florida citrus trees. Since the first report from Orange County in 1960 (4), this weed has spread into Lake, Polk, Osceola, Highlands, De Soto, and Hillsborough Counties (2, 5). The milkweed vine has more recently been found in Marion County.

The vine competes with citrus trees for light, nutrients, and water; interferes with spraying, harvesting, and irrigating, and may girdle the limbs eventually causing death (5). The milkweed vine is in the family Asclepiadaceae and is native to subtropical South America. It is found in southern Brazil, Paraguay, and north and central Argentina (5). Control is particularly difficult because of its prolific seed production, rapid spread of seed by wind, regeneration of new tops from root pieces following hoeing or cultivation, and its high tolerance to most herbicides tested (1,2,3,5).

Biological control with insects or microorganisms offers one possibility for the control of this serious pest. Although only a few microorganisms have been reported on this vine (5), a recent survey revealed the presence of unreported species of Cercospora and Phyllosticta, an unidentified virus, and a basal stem rot of undetermined etiology. One of the organisms, Cercospora sp., was found in all counties where the presence of milkweed vine has been reported.

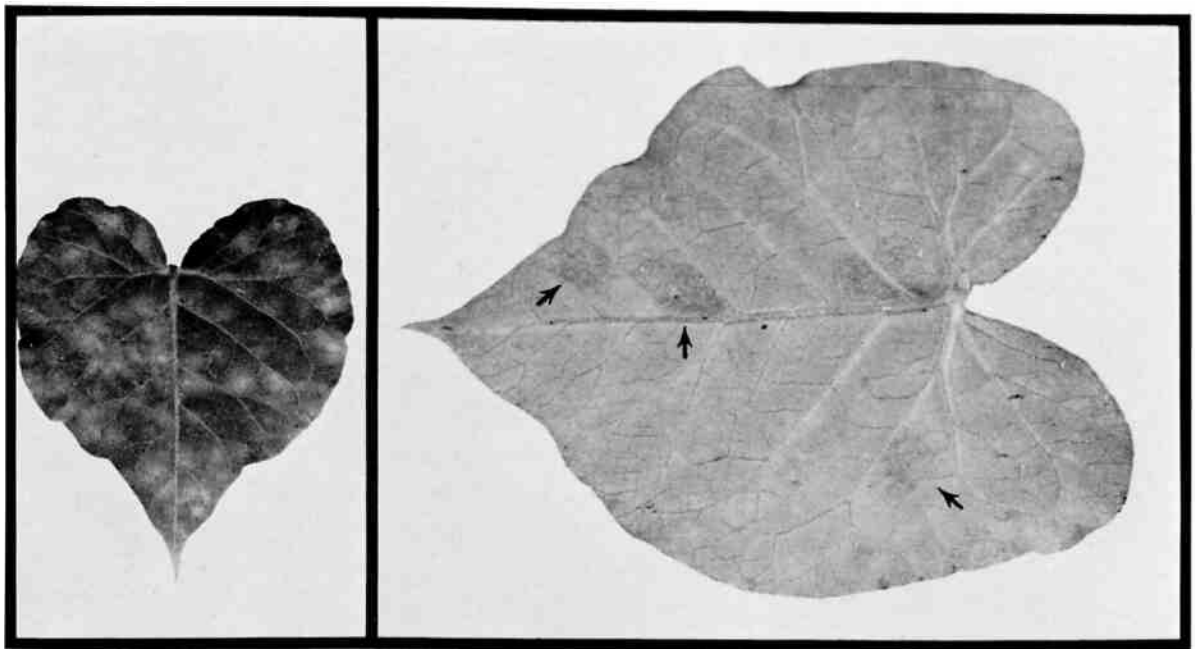

Fig. 1. Cercospora leaf spot of milkweed vine, Morrenia odorata Lindl.: A) top surface of leaf; B) bottom surface of leaf.

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SYMPTOMS. Infections caused by Cercospora on the underside of the leaf occur as dull tan to brown diffuse areas without a prominent border (Fig. 1B). They are irregular in shape, 1/4 to 1/2 inch in diameter, and are often delimited by the larger veins and midrib. Two or more spots may coalesce to form large patches on the underside of the leaf. Symptoms on the top surface of the leaf appear as conspicuous yellow spots (Fig. 1A). As the yellow spots age, they turn a reddish-purple color. Occasionally, severely infected leaves will abscise prematurely.

Literature Cited

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